

DR. WILLIAM J. MOLONEY
COLORADO COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

CASB, CASE, CEA ACCREDITATION SUMMIT
Keynote Address, Third (Final) General Session
Westin Hotel Tabor Center, Denver
February 12, 2000

Thank you very much Ken, for that very gracious introduction.

Indeed, when Ken first became the executive director of CASB, the first thing I was told about him was that he was a lawyer, and that was the reason I thought I had better call him before he called me. But, it's a pleasant, and invigorating relationship that we have had, and, as Ken indicated, it is not one dependent entirely on agreement on every issue. However, it is dependent, and it has worked very well, as a civil, productive conversation with one, unified goal, and that is the betterment of our children in Colorado.

It is fortuitous that today we celebrate the 191st anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln -- that homely, but glorious figure, who, perhaps more than any other president, embodies the national character, in our origins, our aspirations, and our unyielding disposition. Because he, and so many others, gave that last full measure of devotion, we here today, are able, in a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, to debate in democratic fashion the great issues of the day.

What I would like to do today is provide a brief overview of where I see us on this journey of reform that Ken alluded to, and then, I would like to go directly to the matter which has been a central focus of your deliberations here during the last couple of days -- namely accreditation.

Anyone who doubted that education tops the public agenda, or who failed to note the dominance of that topic in Governor Bill Owens' State of the State Address, need only look in on the current General Assembly, where no less than 117 education bills are under consideration. And you will have the good fortune of hearing from Senator Anderson and Representative Allen to illuminate some of those bills a little later.

At the same time, we are seeing some remarkable advances on the part of our neediest children. Led by our small schools and districts, we are seeing academic gains among minority and handicapped youngsters, that no one would have anticipated just a few years ago.

As the Governor and the General Assembly bring a surge of new energy to the cause of reform, Colorado is fortunate that these efforts will rest upon a foundation of solid accomplishment that

has been steadily built since the passage of the landmark Reform Act of 1993. The learning standards ordained by that legislation are now being steadily strengthened by the addition of grade-level expectations in all areas -- a development which has won high praise from the American Federation of Teachers in their rating of the 50 states.

Similarly, the accountability system required by the accreditation legislation of 1998 is gaining success all across the state. Fully a half year before the deadline, many districts have already completed their accreditation contracts, which are basically solid plans for improving student achievement. More about that in a moment.

The challenge of raising scores by 25% over three years on the state accountability test, or CSAP, is also being met by dedicated teachers and principals, including many of you who are here today. Fully 29% of our elementary schools have already improved their scores by 25% or more in just two years.

As Governor Owens and State Board of Education Chairman Clair Orr said in a recent letter of commendation to successful schools, "Those who say it can't be done are commonly interrupted by those doing it."

Former Senate Education Chair and current State Board Member Ben Alexander, who co-sponsored the accountability legislation that brings us here today, put it succinctly, "Where we find leadership and commitment, we find success."

As we analyze our three years' experience with CSAP, some striking patterns emerge, including a validation of the old saw that small is beautiful. Taken together, Colorado's 176 school districts have, on average, improved their combined 4th grade reading and writing scores by 24% in two years. This figure, however, is deceptive, because it disproportionately reflects the success of small districts. Remember that 156 of our districts contain just 26% of our children, while the largest 20 contain 74%.

We should not be surprised by the success of small districts, since change is always easier in smaller, more intimate environments. Nonetheless, this success is good news for everybody, because it is clear evidence that once folks get the hang of the strengthened approaches to instruction required by CSAP, progress follows rapidly.

And, among our larger districts, there are dramatic success stories. Pueblo City and Thompson are two striking examples of the progress brought by this kind of commitment.

The impressive advance of many districts, be they large or small, is also clear evidence that there is no deterministic correlation between wealth and academic success. This is so heartening because it demolishes the depressing idea that educational destiny is largely a matter of zip codes.

In all this rapidly-emerging CSAP data, nothing is more encouraging than the finding that for fourth-grade reading and writing, our handicapped students are advancing faster -- 8.3% -- than non-handicapped -- 6.2%; and minorities faster -- 14.6% -- than non-minorities -- 5.6%. The

absolute number gaps, of course, between these groups, remain substantial, but it is the direction and the commitment behind it that remains all-important.

How did this improvement for the handicapped and minorities occur? Very simply, because a large number of districts have infused new meaning into an old phrase, "All children can learn." The direction reflects a recurring phrase in Governor Owens' speeches, that, "No child shall be left behind."

Though these are but flickering beacons of hope on our educational horizon, they portend a bright future. The dramatic proposals unveiled by Governor Owens have the potential to boost us to a whole new level of advance. They deserve our strong support. These are great days for Colorado education reform, and no time to be faint-hearted.

Let us turn now specifically to this thing called accreditation. If we are to understand what is being asked of us, we must understand from whence this came.

You have had the experience within the last couple of days of listening to a number of very fine presentations, among them those by Dr. Gerry Difford and Dr. Art Ellis. I saw a theme emerging there that Dr. Gerry Difford gave voice to. It reflects a national circumstance regarding this era of education reform that our country finds itself in. If we are in an era of education reform, then logic would suggest to us that somebody believes that something is wrong.

Yet though nearly a generation has passed since the landmark report, *A Nation at Risk*, we still frequently find ourselves divided about whether something is wrong. And that division hampers our attempts to advance on behalf of our children.

We often find national polls where if you ask people how they think education is doing, they'll say, generally, they don't think it's doing well at all. However, if you ask about their local school, they're pretty pleased.

What we see time and again in Colorado, is what we see in every other state. Imagine on one side of the room, the many educators and parents who, if you asked them to sincerely express what was on their mind, they would say, "You know, we have needs. We have particularly financial needs, but, basically the way we're doing things is pretty okay."

Now on the other side of the room, we have people who serve at colleges and universities, and we have our business community. It is impossible to go to any college to speak with any group of deans or professors without hearing endlessly about their sense of how unprepared are the children who enter as freshmen every year. In Colorado, fully one-third of our entering freshmen require remediation. And remember, this is the top half of the class, and yet they require remediation in reading, writing, and/or mathematics. The colleges and universities say that we in K-12 must do something about this, but they have not the slightest doubt that something is wrong.

Similarly, within our business community, it is impossible to go to a Chamber of Commerce or any business gathering in this state -- and I do countless of these each year -- and not hear the

very strong voice of people in business who are saying that something is dramatically amiss in the young people who are coming forward to be the employees of tomorrow. Be it their problems in filling out applications, the problems with work ethic, or whatever. There is a certain and uncompromising voice saying something is wrong. Once again, as with the college and university people, they look at us in K-12 and say, "We know there is something wrong. What are you doing about it?"

Now, when we hear someone like Sol Trujillo, the chairman of the Board of U.S. West, and the largest employer of Colorado speak to a gathering of 2,000 and say, "If we do not do something dramatic within the next ten years, the Colorado graduate will not be competitive." When he says that increasingly U.S. West is unable to fill its positions with Colorado graduates, and the higher they go on the skill level, the greater the problem. When he points to the diminishing percentage of computer science, higher math, science and engineering graduates coming out of the University of Colorado, when he says that half of those receiving Ph.D.s do not hold a U.S. passport, I think we have to pay attention to Sol Trujillo. When he says that of necessity, his company must begin outsourcing jobs, not just out of the state, but out of the country, we have to take this seriously. I am confident we do take this seriously.

Somehow, there is a need to find common ground in this divide. We cannot have it both ways. Either something is wrong, or there isn't. If we can agree on what is wrong, then we are in a stronger position to do the things that we, together, need to do.

Yet there is more, as we listen to the voice of our people across this great state. We now stand separated by 297 days from the events of April 20 at Columbine High School. On that day, as everyone in this room, nay everyone in this country knows, an icy hand closed about the heart of Colorado. Something so terrible had happened that it was beyond the imagining of any citizen. Something so awful had occurred that, "It couldn't happen here," is what all of us would have believed on April 19, the day before.

But, it did happen here, and we are changed forever. In any conversation we have about the fate and future of public education, we must be ready to answer these questions, and those ask, "What is different today... What is different today?"

When I appeared on a national news program, I was questioned by a Bishop from New York State. He said, "Dr. Moloney, if I call you in one year and say, 'What is different in the way Colorado schools are run?' What do you think you will say?" I told him I could not know at that moment of grief, but I hoped that he would call, and I hoped that we would have an answer that, indeed, something is different, and, that indeed, we have reason to believe that our children are safer.

When testifying on a bill in Washington, Congressman Goodling asked about this and I said, "It is one thing to have a concern that your child will come home from school unable to read, but is a wholly different level of concern to worry that your child might not come home at all."

In looking at all of this -- be it threats to our schools of literacy or to life itself -- we must accept without hesitation or reservation that business as usual simply will not do.

Now, what does any of this have to do with accreditation? I would explain it this way, in terms of the time that I have been here. Let me take you back to October of 1997. I had only been Commissioner for one month. I was invited to a meeting in the State Capitol with Senator Ben Alexander, the Chairman of the Senate Education Committee, Representative Debbie Allen, the Chairman of the House Education Committee, and then Representative Norma Anderson, the Majority Leader of the House. What the meeting was about, was that in Colorado for five years, these individuals and many others, had been working to make schools better, but what they said very clearly was, **“Standards and assessments won’t mean a thing unless we have accountability to do the things, to put matters right where we find them to be wrong.”**

One month later, we had the first results of the CSAP tests. I recall Governor Roy Romer, before our visit with the editorial boards, feeling that though he knew much was wrong, he didn’t realize the depth of that problem.

We thought about how we would represent this news, not just to editorial boards, but to the entire State of Colorado. And what we said was, “The bad news is the good news. Yes, it’s bad that we’re seeing that our young people are not reading and writing in the way that we would want them to -- that they are not measuring up to the standards that Coloradans developed -- but the good news is that Coloradans have stepped up to the plate in a courageous manner, determined to join hands to do what needs to be done.”

Two months after that, in January of 1998, in his last State of the State Address, Governor Romer surfaced the notion that these scores must get better, and that they must improve by 25% in three years. Some people ask me, “Where did he get that idea?” I asked, and Governor Romer who, as you know was very involved in the national reform movement, said, “I’ve looked at every state, and the State of Washington where my friend, the Democratic Governor Gary Locke presides, is doing 25%, 80% and that seems pretty good by what all of the experts are saying.

I make that point because we know Governor Romer was a friend of education. And what reform is about in America is something that transcends partisanship. It matters not the party of the Governor, the party of the Legislature. This is a national crusade; it is larger than party. This is about the future of America.

In November of that year, when we had the next CSAP results and our state scores had not moved too much higher, the theme that we struck then and rightly so, was that, “Success is breaking out all over!”

There first came to our attention at that time the extraordinary work of the teachers at Bessemer Elementary, and, not just there, but all across the state, and most encouragingly, in some of our poorest school districts. And leading the way, though we didn’t see the pattern as clearly, were our small and our rural school districts.

Now, without question, I think it has been very difficult for anyone in education to deal with this kind of bad news.

You had in this conference a most excellent speaker named Mike Moses. Mike was the Commissioner for the State of Texas. He took a leading role in bringing Texas to the forefront of the nation in terms of school reform.

Mike and I would speak from time to time at various gatherings because we had something in common. Both of us had been superintendents in states that were bringing a very heavy drill of testing and accountability to the schools. Mike, like myself, as he put it in his address to you the other day, felt a great deal of pain. He was on the receiving end of that pain.

And then, as he told you, when he was called to be the Commissioner of the State, he found himself in the position of delivering that pain to those who were his former colleagues and friends. That is not an easy thing to do. Mike Moses was called a “basher of education.” His test was called “unfair.” It was called “inequitable.” It was called many things.

But today, most people will look objectively and see Texas as one of the leaders in the nation. So shall it be here in Colorado, as I know we will have the courage to stay the course.

Yes, that pain is difficult. I remember visiting with the teachers of Bessemer. And they spoke most movingly of the pain and embarrassment that they felt when their first scores came out, but they said very clearly, “We felt awful, but that was the necessary beginning of making things better for our children. We’d do it again.”

For that reason and many others, they are rightly heroes to all Coloradoans, and so they were honored on the floor of the House of Representatives during the last session.

Now, the accreditation contract. When I hear the word contract, I guess I’m buying a house, buying a car, taking a dicey sort of job, or something that needs to be looked at carefully.

Why are we using that word contract? I spoke to the most senior of our Assistant Commissioners, Dr. Arthur Ellis.

I said, “Art, what about this contract thing?”

And he said, “Oh, we’ve been doing that forever.”

And I said, “Give me a little more by way of specifics.”

Some of you, those who are local board members have heard this. The State Board of Education sent you a letter to go over some of this, as did superintendents learn this from recent *Chieflines*.

In 1974, the State of Colorado adopted the phrase, “Accreditation by Contract.” If you’re going to be accredited, that’s how you’ll do it. Eighteen years later in 1992, when they altered the Rules for Accreditation, they came up with yet a new phrase, “Enterprise Contract,” and some districts were doing that.

So, an accreditation contract is something everyone in this room already has. It's on file in your district office, and it's probably been renewed several times.

- How did you get it? You sent paper to the Colorado Department of Education.
- What did it say on the paper? It said that you were working hard to give solid instruction to kids.
- What did the Colorado Department of Education do with the paper? Well, first we sent you a letter and said, "Thank you. You are accredited," and then we put the paper in a file drawer.

What I am attempting to do here is suggest to you that there are very great challenges before us, but this accreditation contract is not one of them.

Let me get a little audience participation. Is Laddie Livingston here by any chance? Or, is anyone from Delta here? All right, no one from Delta. And I think I know why. Because Laddie, who is one of the more senior and colorful of Colorado's superintendents, has figured this whole thing out. So he's probably found something else to do on Saturday.

Laddie sent last week to Art Ellis a two-page draft of his accreditation contract. Art has been studying it closely. It's pretty tightly drawn, and so forth. Laddie speaks colorfully -- often when speaking of State officials, he speaks very colorfully -- and as a good citizen of the Western Slope, he speaks very colorfully about people in general from the Front Range and from Denver in particular.

Now, we have many completed contracts that have come in; we have many drafts of contracts. Some of them are very short -- three, five pages. Some of them are the size of the Manhattan telephone directory. Most bear a striking resemblance to the district's strategic plan, or whatever else. This is the kind of thing [we are receiving].

I think someone else did audience participation the other day, a member of our State Board of Education who is with us, Mr. Gully Stanford from the First Congressional District. I think he asked how many folks had had a good sit-down chat in the district offices about this thing called an accreditation contract. And I think what the result of that poll showed is that if that happens, if you take an hour, go over that, board members, superintendents, by the end of that hour, you'll see that, while the world may be filled with many challenges: financial, political, and otherwise, the accreditation contract is not one of them. So, hopefully, we can grasp that reality, and move to the essence of what some of those real challenges are.

In that connection, let me speak about the things which our Governor spoke of yesterday.

As you know, a most striking and a most comprehensive program of reform has been placed before us by the Governor. Something that was valuable in his remarks yesterday -- and he sent a copy of that speech to the State Board of Education before coming here -- was about the compatibility of what we are doing at the State Board of Education and CDE, and what he is doing. Said our Governor, "These reforms go hand in glove with the State Board of Education's

accreditation process, which is focused on school districts. I've worked with the State Board, and there is harmony between their district accountability efforts and my school performance efforts. I see no conflict between the two; they are complementary."

Now, behind that lies a great deal of work. The Governor did not come to the field of education reform lately, and certainly not lightly. I recall over a year ago, when he was still Governor elect, when I was on a holiday vacation with my family and the phone rang, back in New England. My daughter, Catherine, ran to the phone --at that time, she believed that all phone calls must be for her, or should be for her -- and she picked up the phone and then she turned around and looked at me somewhat disdainfully and said, "Do you know someone called Bill Owens?" I said, "Give me that phone!"

Now, the point of that story is to say that from the very beginning, there has been close cooperation and communication on the things that needed to be done. One of the first official meetings that Governor Owens had after his inauguration, was with the State Board of Education, and there have been several meetings since that time. In his inaugural address, he spoke of report cards, and virtually all of the program, in broad brush strokes, albeit, has been laid out for some time -- and not just between the Governor and the State Board of Education, but also with the leaders of our State Legislature. For after all, it is they who have been putting together the building blocks of reform in Colorado, going back to 1993. So, through this year, a great deal has gone on to prepare the way for what we have before us now.

Now, it is one thing to have agreement on broad concepts of what needs to be done. However, drafting legislation is, as I'm sure Senator Anderson and Representative Allen will tell you, something completely different. Colorado has a big agenda education-wise, and there are big bills running to hundreds of pages.

Are there things that need to be worked on? Absolutely. The Governor said that. Are there things that are going to make it stronger? Absolutely. All who are involved -- the sponsoring Legislators, the Governor, the State Board, the education organizations -- everyone knows that it is in our interest to come together to make these things fit together.

We have a tremendous opportunity, for example, to reconcile the central tension in our assessment program. The CSAP, as it was designed by the Legislature many years ago, was intended to be an accountability instrument for the state. It was never intended to provide diagnostic information for districts. And yet, school districts have a legitimate need for precisely those things.

The glittering opportunity we have before us is to marry the legitimate desire of the State for accountability and the districts' need for diagnostic information to inform and improve instruction and track the progress of individual children.

The result, if we work hard, if we work together, will be less testing in Colorado, because we have too much, like every other state. We test two and a half times as much as anyone else in the industrial world. Less testing, less precious dollars expended on testing, less time of teachers

preparing, if we come together. And I am confident that we will and you will hear much by way of important detail when you hear from Senator Anderson and Representative Allen.

Let me close on a note that I think is as hopeful as anything we see anywhere on our horizon. I alluded to that in my earlier remarks, that we have a chance. In fact, we have already made the beginnings of closing a learning gap between our most affluent and our most vulnerable children. Now, this is the thing that must be reinforced. **The opportunity to close the learning gap between the affluent and the vulnerable, this must happen.**

In recent meetings with minority leaders, we have discussed this opportunity revolving around accreditation. We have discussed this with Attorney General Salazar, Governor Owens, members of the Legislature. They are as one regarding the importance of this cause. This opportunity, this need to bring the circumstances of our children together in more equitable fashion, this, I think is the hallowed ground of educational reform. **It is nothing less than, educationally speaking, the moral imperative of our time.**

A third of a century ago, while seeking the presidency of the United States, Robert F. Kennedy walked the streets of Harlem, so recently blasted by violence and riot, and decried the appalling conditions which had ground down and wasted the lives of countless children, and he said, "If, by the time the next President of the United States leaves office, we have not made substantive and important address to these conditions, it shall be a stain upon our national honor. It shall be a disgrace and a rebuke to the ideals upon which this country was founded."

The next president, not he, of course, came and went, and the next...and the next...and the next. And still today, particularly in our great urban centers, these conditions still obtain. We have not found that answer, but we can.

I would submit to you that if, in this new century, we are to remain one nation, indivisible, under God, then, we cannot have two systems of education, divided by the failings of men. We have in Colorado before us the glowing prospect of lifting the achievement of all children, but in particular, ending those dangerous divisions that threaten the future of our great Republic.

If we can do this, and you know we can, we shall redeem the vision of our forefathers who first dreamed America as the "Shining City on a Hill." Yes, indeed, these are great days, but each of them shall be filled with challenges, and we know that in the words of the poet, "We have miles to go...and promises to keep."

Let us go forward together with a strong and active faith. May the Lord bless you, this great country, and the vital work that you do every day for the children of Colorado.

Thank you.